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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY PUSHING STABILITY MESSAGE HARD

REF: A. QUITO 2874

- [1](#)B. GUAYAQUIL 1231
- [1](#)C. QUITO 2869
- [1](#)D. QUITO 2868
- [1](#)E. QUITO 2859

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Reftels outline the current political quicksand enveloping GoE President Lucio Gutierrez. Believing further instability runs counter to Ecuadorian and U.S. interests, the Embassy is immersed in an outreach campaign to bolster rank-and-file support for constitutional democracy and the country's freely elected leader. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. Four political parties are arrayed against Gutierrez: the PSC, ID, MPD, and Pachakutik. Impeachment proceedings began October 28 and may run until year-end. Although most experts doubt the opposition can sum the necessary votes in Congress to remove the president, he undoubtedly will emerge further weakened (Gutierrez's approval ratings hover around 10 percent). Believing such volatility damaging to Ecuadorian and U.S. goals, the Embassy has stepped up public and private outreach in an effort to buoy the GoE. We have seen some success already, as anti-Gutierrez media play has diminished in recent days.

[1](#)3. Our private contacts are regular and numerous. During this week's round of Andean Free Trade Agreement talks in Guayaquil, the Ambassador and Guayaquil CG called on two key opposition politicians, Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot and Guayas Prefect Nicolas Lapentti. Both hail from the Social Christian Party (PSC), whose leader, Leon Febres-Cordero, is leading the impeachment crusade (Reftels). In Quito on October 27, the Ambassador talked instability and its side effects with Gutierrez. She discussed the president's defense strategy the same day with Minister of Government Raul Baca. Last, in an October 22 working lunch with Defmin Nelson Herrera and Joint Forces Chief Admiral Victor Rosero, the Ambassador reviewed, amongst other topics, the potentially stabilizing role of the military in weak democracies like Ecuador (Ref E).

[1](#)4. The Embassy's PA campaign is equally robust. From JOs to counselors and agency heads, Embassy staff have deployed throughout Ecuador, ostensibly to discuss U.S. elections but driving home a between-the-lines message: modern democracies change administrations via the ballot box, not the gun barrel or the smoke-filled room. Post's Information Officer gave print and radio interviews in Cuenca, Ecuador's third city. And in trips to coastal cities Manta and Machala, the Ambassador emphasized the USG's firm support for Ecuadorian democracy and GoE institutions. We back our dialog with dollars, she clarified, funding projects in Ecuador to advance the rule of law, strengthen local governance, and augment law enforcement.

[1](#)5. Consulate General Guayaquil has leveraged the Embassy effort with its own outreach campaign. As three of Ecuador's five largest political parties hail from the coast, the Consulate is well-placed to advance the stability message. Non-Mission USG personnel too have joined the media campaign. USTR's Regina Vargo, leading the U.S. FTA negotiating team, has not missed an opportunity to promote Gutierrez's commitment to free trade, calling it a boon to Ecuador's long-term prosperity.

[1](#)6. COMMENT: Gutierrez's survival depends on Gutierrez, of course, and Ecuador's democracy on Ecuadorians. Yet the Embassy can employ weapons to help prevent the nation from entering another self-inflicted, political death spiral. We walk a fine line between loitering by and "uninvitedly involving ourselves in internal Ecuadorian matters" (and face criticism for either tack). But a political meltdown, and the real possibility of an accompanying economic collapse, make inaction unthinkable. END COMMENT.

KENNEY